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SUBJECT: CANADIAN OFFICIALS AND 'MANLEY PANEL' CHART WAY
AHEAD IN AFGHANISTAN

REF: A. OTTAWA 2029

[1](#)B. USDAO OTTAWA 052056Z NOV

Classified By: PolMinCouns Scott Bellard, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C/NF) Summary: Canada's Defense Minister believes Canadian and Afghan forces are performing well in southern Afghanistan but he and his colleagues are worried about the minority Conservative government's ability to convince Parliament to authorize an extension of the current mission from 2009 to February of 2011. The government and the new "Panel on the Future Role of Canada in Afghanistan" (known as the Manley Panel) will work hard over the next three months to "recast" the Afghan mission in a way that will permit opposition Liberals to support it. European enablers and maneuver forces would bolster support for the mission among Canadians who feel they have borne an unfair burden in restive Kandahar. Should under-performing Europeans fail to help the Canadians, U.S. forces might have to fill the gap under the auspices of ISAF if we hope to ensure the continued deployment of Canadian Forces in RC-S. Panel members will likely raise these issues, as well as a request for the expedited delivery of MQ-9 Predator Bs and other systems, when they meet senior U.S. officials in Washington on December 10. End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Counselor of the Department of State Dr. Eliot Cohen and Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (DASD) for Central Asia Mitch Shivers met senior Canadian officials in Ottawa November 13 - 14. They heard a broad range of Canadian views of the Afghanistan mission, and learned about the role of a new panel that the Prime Minister has asked to review and make recommendations on Canadian participation in NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), to include whether Canadian combat forces should remain in Kandahar after February 2009. They also discussed NATO member responses to Canadian requests for help with enablers and additional maneuver forces, as well as the effectiveness of NATO-ISAF planning and operations.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Dr. Cohen's and DASD Shivers' program featured meetings with Minister of Defence Peter MacKay, Foreign and Defence Policy Adviser to the Prime Minister Susan Cartwright, Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) Director Jim Judd, Former Regional Command - South (RC-S) Commander General David Fraser, Foreign and National Security Adviser to the Prime Minister Keith Fountain, Privy Council Office (PCO) Assistant Secretary Jill Sinclair, and others. They spoke to defense and security opinion leaders in Ottawa

and professors and students at the Royal Military College (RMC) in Kingston, and met with the two most senior members of the Panel on the Future Role of Canada in Afghanistan, Chairman (and former Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister) John Manley and former Ambassador to the United States Derek Burney.

Canada's Future in RC-S, Afghanistan

¶4. (C) Minister of Defence MacKay had just returned from Kandahar, where Canadian troops and their Afghan National Army (ANA) counterparts had distinguished themselves in battle at Arghandab near Kandahar. The local population warmly received the ANA and the Canadians in Arghandab; MacKay commented that this indicated the deployment of QMacKay commented that this indicated the deployment of Canadian maneuver forces combined with their training and mentoring of ANA troops was paying dividends. Such progress is a "political enabler" of public support in Canada, MacKay underscored. (Comment: This Canadian desire for explicit progress was echoed by most of the Counselor's interlocutors. End comment)

¶5. (C) While things are going well on the battle front, according to MacKay, there is uncertainty at home. Indeed, he added, if a vote were held tomorrow, Parliament would not extend the Canadian Forces' (CF) combat mission beyond 2009. This is why the Harper government created the "Manley Panel," he noted. The government hopes that the Panel will "depoliticize" the issue and create a political space for the government and sympathetic opposition members to "recast" the mission in a way that the Liberal leadership, as well as its rank-and-file, could accept. The Panel will issue its report in the third week of January, followed by a debate and vote

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in Parliament -- probably in February but before NATO's Bucharest Summit -- on whether to extend the mission and in what capacity through February 2011.

¶6. (C) After the Panel submits its report, the government will press hard in Parliament for language giving it "maximum flexibility," MacKay emphasized, to include the continued deployment of combat forces in ISAF. He highlighted that if NATO partners want Canada to succeed in Parliament and remain in theater, they should move quickly to find ways to deliver enablers such as dedicated helicopters, UAVs, and other "tech support" to RC-S. There is also a critical need for additional maneuver forces in the south. MacKay indicated that such deliverables would have a profound psychological and practical effect on Canadians.

¶7. (C) MacKay revealed that Canada has been discussing the provision of helicopters in RC-S with Germany and Poland. Germany is still weighing options to deploy without breaking its unhelpful caveats, he said, while Poland has "said all the right things" but has not followed through.

The Panel

¶8. (C) Chairman Manley (a Liberal) and Ambassador Burney (a Conservative) laid out their current thinking on the work of the Panel (ref a). According to Manley, Liberal Leader Stephane Dion had backed himself into a corner with his strident demands that Canada end its combat role in February 2009. Even though many Liberals disagree with Dion on Afghanistan, he said, it is currently impossible to know how the Liberals would vote on the matter. Manley and like-minded Liberals want to see the Panel "raise and depoliticize" the discussion of Afghanistan, and for the Panel to describe the next iteration of Canadian participation in the mission in a way that Dion could characterize as a "win" for the Liberals.

Predators

¶9. (C) Manley asked if the U.S. government would be able to help Canada expedite the procurement of General Atomic MQ-9 Predators Bs. The forthcoming Panel report would likely suggest specific enhancements before Canada commits to extending its CF combat presence in RC-S. Among them -- if General Atomic and the USG could assure Canada of early delivery -- would be the MQ-9 Predator B, due in part to its utility in detecting and destroying teams planting IEDs. (Note: IEDs, mines, and roadside bombs have caused 24 of the CFs 26 troop deaths this year. end note)

¶10. (C) Manley commented that the introduction of the Predator would be good for the CF, and would also give Liberal leader Dion some political cover. Dion could make its procurement a condition for agreeing to the extension in RC-S, and win points for protecting Canadian troops. "I need something big" to garner Liberal votes, Manley said. The Panel will probably include an additional NATO battle group on the list of "requirements," he added. A French or other capable European battle group would be politically more useful than one from the U.S. but the bottom line is that Canada needs to see more maneuver forces in RC-S, according to MacKay.

¶11. (C) During a subsequent meeting, PMO adviser Keith Fountain also raised the Predator, asking if delivery to the CF would be "doable" before 2009. On both occasions, Dr. QCF would be "doable" before 2009. On both occasions, Dr. Cohen and DASD Shivers agreed to look into the issue, but made no promises. Dr. Cohen emphasized that Canada would need to make clear that it intends to remain in a combat role in a sustained way.

The Allies

¶12. (C) Manley and Burney explained that, while they would try to set conditions for success in Parliament, the political window of opportunity was small and there was no guarantee they would succeed. NATO allies could continue to refuse Canadian requests for help in the south, the already high Canadian casualty rate could spike, the current troubles

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in Pakistan could cause profoundly negative effects in RC-S, or the United States could poison the regional political environment by taking unilateral military action against Iran, they commented. Any one or a combination of these things could lead Dion to decide against seizing the very opportunity the Panel was working to create.

¶13. (C) Assistant Secretary Sinclair and PMO Adviser Fountain raised under-performing allies, strategic communications, concerns about growing instability in Pakistan, and the need to validate Canadian sacrifices to date with success in Afghanistan. They expressed support for "hardening" the Afghan border to keep the Pakistan conflict from spilling over and underscored Canada's worry that the U.S. might go it alone against Iran. Sinclair acknowledged that ISAF members were coming up short, but stressed that the legitimacy that came with UN-sanctioned NATO operations was critically important to maintaining Canadian support for the mission. In this context, Canada would prefer that any surge in U.S troops or combat support to the region be under the auspices of ISAF rather than Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), according to Fountain.

¶14. (C) MacKay, Cartwright, Sinclair, and Fountain separately noted that it was impossible to have the broad-based strategic discussion at NATO's NAC that the mission necessitated, but expressed concern that a formal meeting of countries that have actually deployed serious combat forces to Afghanistan risked exacerbating cleavages

within NATO. Sinclair emphasized the Canadian preference for operating with allies under UN mandates. Both Manley and Burney were supportive of a senior "civilian gorilla," but cautioned that Canada does not want to be left in the cold. "If the Gorilla goes to a European, and the United States continues to get the primary say in Afghanistan, then what about Canada?" Burney urged the U.S. to consider a Canadian deputy.

Effectiveness of NATO-ISAF

¶15. (C) At RMC, General Fraser spoke about the effectiveness of NATO-ISAF in Afghanistan, noting that he had led troops in Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) before switching to NATO-ISAF in RC-S, "the strategic center of gravity for the region and the country." It was better under OEF, he said, because commanders were able to understand the conflict in regional terms and to fight across artificial, Western-imposed geographical boundaries that later hardened under ISAF due to harmful caveats and other impediments to concerted action. These boundaries became seams for the Taliban to exploit, he argued.

¶16. (C) Despite personal and institutional stresses on the military and its 62,000 regular and 28,000 reserve troops, Fraser said, the CF is committed to and capable of maintaining the combat element of its mission in RC-S. Canada and its allies must consider the second-order effects if we fail, Fraser observed; "China, Russia, Iran, and the rest of the world are watching."

¶17. (C) Fraser stressed the importance of a coordinated information campaign if ISAF wishes to win public opinion in the battle space and on the home front. From the time an incident has occurred, it takes the Taliban only 60 minutes to get its side of the story to the international press. ISAF must be as nimble, able to anticipate when possible or to react within an hour with media points when caught by surprise, he suggested.

¶18. (C) Fraser argued for broadening ISAF's use of specialty policing (such as anti-gang officers) and other unique non-military skill sets, deploying imams to take its message to the mosques, and creating one schoolhouse for military forces and civilian officials who work on insurgencies. While his troops did "a lot of fighting," perhaps the most effective element of his strategic plan was a jobs program run by the Canadian PRT, he commented. Its primary goal was to keep men of fighting age busy contributing to family incomes in a way that was more attractive to most young men than the options offered by the Taliban.

¶19. (C) Responding to a question about the negative trends

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appearing in intelligence products regarding Afghanistan, Fraser said that "intel folks tend to paint worst case scenarios to avoid being caught flat-footed...so I focus on field reports and then temper them with intelligence products." UN agencies and NGO's also exaggerate, he added, for their own institutional reasons.

¶20. (C) Fraser asked if ISAF was building an ANA that could persist after the West withdrew from Afghanistan. Do Western high-tech solutions create unreasonable expectations and demands? DASD Shivers noted that U.S. forces had taken up the issue and were working to ensure that the ANA would be in alignment with Afghan realities. Fraser, as well as other senior officials, responded positively to Dr. Cohen's suggestion that wealthier Arab states might see it in their interests to underwrite ANA and policing costs over the long-term to ensure greater regional stability.

Comment

¶21. (C) Canada's minority government, the Liberal and Conservative members of the Manley Panel, and the overwhelming majority of soldiers and officials working the Afghanistan issue agree that Canada should extend its deployment of combat forces to RC-S through 2011. We and our interlocutors are guardedly optimistic about the government and the Panel's ability to draw the Liberal leader to their side or, barring that, hive-off enough Liberal votes to have it their way without him. However, it remains possible the government will lose the vote on extension in Parliament, and will feel compelled to end kinetic operations in 2009. There is only a two-to-three month window of opportunity before the Panel completes its report and Parliament votes on whether to extend the mission from 2009 to 2011, making the upcoming December 10 visit to Washington by Panel members all the more timely and important. Panel members will likely encourage senior U.S. officials to help them shape the environment in which Canada's Afghan extension debate will occur by:

- assuring the Canadians that their continued commitment to a combat role in Afghanistan would earn them a place at the front of the line for delivery of MQ-9 Predator B UAVs;
- supporting Canada's effort to get European allies to provide dedicated combat helicopter support to Canadian forces in RC-S;
- should the Europeans fail to deliver, offering the Canadians U.S. 101st Airborne Division dedicated helicopter support when it deploys in January 2008;
- offering political and, if required, materiel support to the Canadians' ongoing effort to get European allies (Norway, Poland, Georgia, etc.) to deploy a multinational maneuver battalion under Canadian command in RC-S.

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